

Van Winkle waking up and seeing all these changes in the world, but he finally could feel comfort because the school looked the same.

My kids graduated from college not long ago, but not too long ago high school. One of the things that consistently has caused me great concern is that the schools they went to look dangerously like the schools I went to. Yet we carry around personal computers. Every single one of us operates with computers. We have computers right here in the Senate Chamber. Yet we do not have one on the desk for every child in America. So we are leaving kids behind in a lot of different ways. We say in our budget resolution, that is not OK. We want to turn that around. So we put dollars back. We stopped the cuts the President has, and we invest more dollars in education and innovation.

Then we say if you are working hard and you are trying to make ends meet, and you are working in a job that does not have health insurance for your family, you ought to be able to know that when you go to bed at night your kids have health care and you can do something about it if they get sick. That is what we do by making a commitment to fully fund what is called SCHIP, the Children's Health Insurance Program. This is something that is available to working families. Low-income families are able to receive Medicaid. These are families who are working hard, families whose minimum wage we raised not long ago. So maybe they only have to work two jobs now instead of three to make ends meet, but they still do not have health insurance. We make a commitment to provide that health insurance for every child of a working family.

That is a very important value. It is a very important principle. I hope we are going to come together with strong bipartisan support to be able to do that.

We also then keep our promise to our veterans. We all know what has happened at Walter Reed. We know also there are other very serious system problems. In my State of Michigan, people wait too long to see a doctor. They drive too far to get basic kinds of tests, blood drawn, or x rays. We need to do a better job for our veterans. We need, frankly, to get them out of the yearly budget process and put them into a situation where they know their funding is assured.

Our budget, for the first time ever, I assume—certainly for the first time since I have been here; and I have asked others, and I think it is the first time ever—we have in the budget the amount recommended by the independent budget which is organized by all the veterans groups. The veterans groups have come together. They analyze the VA health system and other needs and recommend to us what is needed.

For the first time, our budget for veterans health care and other critical

needs matches what they are recommending. This is very important. We are making veterans—our men and women who are coming home from wars, who put on a veteran's cap, who may have tremendous hardships, physical challenges, mental challenges, financial challenges from being extended more than once—and with serious issues for families—we make veterans a top priority and say we are going to keep our promise to our veterans. That is an integral part of our budget resolution.

Then we go back to what we have always been about. The other side will say: Well, we are for tax increases. No. No. We just want to see the folks who are working hard, who are the majority of Americans, get the tax cut. I am not interested in another tax cut for somebody who makes over \$1 million a year, who got \$118,000 back in a tax cut last year. I want somebody making \$118,000 a year to get a tax cut. We start by saying the alternative minimum tax, which is creeping up and hitting middle-income people, should be changed so it does not become the alternative middle class tax. We are very focused on making sure the other parts of the Tax Code that are important to families remain in place and that we, in fact, are giving middle-class tax cuts.

Then we take a look at all of the efforts to deinvest, to defund that the President recommended in education, cutting the COPS Program again, firefighter grants, various kinds of technology programs, environmental programs in Michigan, and I know in Ohio as well. The manufacturing extension partnership is important for small and medium-sized businesses to be able to help them receive technical assistance, to be able to compete in the global economy, to be able to hire more people. We have restored the funding for that. We address other technology programs. So we also reject the President's efforts to move away from critical areas of priority and need of the American people.

So there are a lot of other pieces in this budget, but these basically, overall, are the important priorities that we have placed in the budget that say to the American people: We care about you. We want to put you and your family first. We know that you are squeezed on all sides. If you are from Michigan and losing your job or being asked to take less in your job or pay more for your health care or lose your pension, it is time to fix that. It is time to make you a priority.

That is what this budget does. It makes the people who work hard every day, who make this country run—the middle class, the people working hard every day to get into that middle class, who keep the economic engine of this country going—it makes them the priority. That is what this is all about. It is about whose interests are going to be represented in this budget.

I am very proud of the fact we are representing the interests of the major-

ity of Americans, the folks who are working hard and seeing the gas prices go up along with the oil company profits, who are seeing their health care costs go up, maybe losing their pension, seeing the cost of college go up for their kids. Everything is going up and up and up and up. Those are the folks whose pockets we want to put money back into. That is where we want the tax cuts to go. That is where we want the tax cuts to go. That is where we want the investments in the future to go. That is what this budget resolution does.

I am very proud of the fact that we return fiscal discipline and we put middle-class families first. It is about time.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MORNING BUSINESS

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that there now be a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RETIREMENT OF GENERAL JOHN ABIZAID

Mr. REID. Mr. President, last Friday GEN John Abizaid handed over the job of Commander of the U.S. Central Command to ADM William J. Fallon and officially entered retired life, a civilian citizen for the first time in more than 30 years.

General Abizaid entered the U.S. Army as a second lieutenant after graduating from West Point in 1973. General Abizaid is among the elite of the Army's infantry commanders—an Airborne Ranger. Over his time in the military, he led paratroopers in several key units of the 82nd Airborne Division, including the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment and the 325th Airborne. In command of a Ranger Rifle Company, he was one of the first commanders on the ground during the invasion of Grenada. He deployed to Kurdistan during the first gulf crisis, was Commandant of West Point, Division Commander of the Big Red One, Deputy Commander of Central Command during Operation Iraqi Freedom, and took over as Commander of Central Command in 2003.

What most has distinguished General Abizaid is his combined ability as both a warrior and as one of our Nation's great strategic thinkers regarding the Middle East. He knows and understands the Middle East and its strategic implications for American security. As a young officer, John Abizaid

learned fluent Arabic, served as an Olmsted Scholar in Jordan, served with the United Nations Observer Group Lebanon, and conducted strategic research at Harvard and Stanford Universities. In his generation, there were few officers with this combined set of skills and experiences, and he served as a role model to those who now protect America's interests and fight for security in the Middle East. In the next generation of officers in the years to come, we will need hundreds, if not thousands, more like him.

I am especially pleased that General Abizaid has chosen to return to near where he grew up by making his new civilian residence in my great State of Nevada. General Abizaid has said that after retirement he would like to continue to examine how best to reform the national security apparatus of our Government to better address the "long war" that he believes we are fighting against violent extremism, to empower moderates in the region, and to rebuild the power, influence and security of the United States. He has said he may even write a book on these subjects, and I would hope he would do so. He has served the Nation ably and honorably over the last several decades, and while I wish him his fair share of peace, quiet, rest and relaxation not far from the shores of Lake Tahoe, I believe he has years of additional service to the Nation ahead of him. We owe General Abizaid our thanks and our deep gratitude, and I look forward to working with him in his new chapter.

BOB FERRARO RETIREMENT

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to the longest serving current elected official in southern Nevada, Boulder City, NV—Mayor Robert Stanley "Bob" Ferraro. Later this spring, Bob will retire after 31 years of dedicated public service.

For three decades, Bob has been a civic leader, kind neighbor, and level-headed voice in the politically active and dynamic community he has called home since 1970. For 17 years, Bob served on the Boulder City Council. Later, he was elevated to serve the city as its mayor. In 1999, he became the first mayor directly elected by the people of Boulder City. During each campaign, he proudly knocked on every door in town—a feat he accomplished seven times.

During his time in public service, Bob has presided over Boulder City in an era of unprecedented growth, expanding from 7,800 residents in 1976 to more than 15,000 today. The community Bob calls home is one of those unique places in America that has managed to maintain its distinctive identity in the face of massive change. Throughout the last three decades of unparalleled growth in southern Nevada, Bob Ferraro has stood alongside Boulder City residents to fiercely defend limited growth policies that have preserved this special place.

Located just 20 miles from Las Vegas, Boulder City was built by the Bureau of Reclamation during the Great Depression as a housing complex for workers building nearby Hoover Dam. While the original residents flocked to Boulder City seeking opportunity, modern times have seen generations of families choosing to reside in this city on the shore of Lake Mead for its superb quality of life, access to outdoor recreation, and sense of community.

This sense of community can be attributed, in part, to Bob's hard work. As mayor, Bob encouraged the development of parks and recreation areas throughout Boulder City. These parks affect the lives of all residents, young and old. From youth sports leagues to adult recreational programs, Boulder City's park system has allowed all residents to continue to enjoy the smalltown feel that makes this city unique.

Throughout his time serving the Boulder City community, Bob never forgot that he was a part of the community. He is a past President of the Boulder City Rotary Club and was named the 1980 Rotarian of the Year. He also served as president of the Nevada League of Cities in 1985 and was named Nevada Public Official of the Year in 1986.

His leadership, sincerity, and poise will be missed. I am honored to pay tribute to Bob Ferraro as he prepares to complete his distinguished service to Boulder City and Nevada. I wish him and his wife Connie, his three children, and eight grandchildren much happiness for the future. Southern Nevada is truly a better place because of Bob.

NORTHEAST PENNSYLVANIA MEDICARE WAGE INDEX

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, for a considerable period of time, there have been a number of counties in Pennsylvania that have been suffering from low Medicare reimbursements, which has caused them great disadvantage in comparison to surrounding areas. I refer specifically to Luzerne, Lackawanna, Wyoming, Lycoming, and Columbia in northeastern Pennsylvania, and there are open disadvantaged counties elsewhere in Pennsylvania. Those counties are surrounded by MSAs, metropolitan statistical areas, with higher Medicare reimbursements in Newark, and New York, to the east; in Allentown to the southeast; and in Harrisburg to the southwest. As a result, a flight of very necessary medical personnel has occurred as northeast Pennsylvania hospitals are not able to provide employees with adequate competitive wages.

Further complicating this issue are the exceptions to the Medicare wage index regulations. Since 1987, exceptions have been created to the wage index program for rural facilities, new facilities, and others. In fact, in 1999, Congress passed legislative reclassi-

fications for specific hospitals to allow selected facilities to move to a new MSA and receive greater Medicare reimbursement. While these reclassifications have improved funding for those hospitals, hospitals that did not receive improved funding are being further disadvantaged.

It has also come to my attention that inpatient rehabilitation facilities are not provided an opportunity to obtain equitable Medicare reimbursement. Inpatient rehabilitation facilities receive adjustments in their Medicare reimbursement due to geographic disadvantages within the Medicare inpatient prospective payment system. This is based on information gathered from other acute care facilities in the MSA, not from their own wage information. Thus, inpatient rehabilitation facilities cannot apply for reclassification to another MSA that reflects their actual labor costs. As such, the facilities are prevented from being eligible for increased funding to assist with wages like acute care facilities, while being forced to compete for employees with those facilities that have had access to increased funding.

I have worked to find a solution to the Medicare wage index disparity in reimbursement for a number of years. During the conference for the fiscal year 2002 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill, the conferees agreed that there should be relief for these areas in Pennsylvania that were surrounded by areas with higher MSA ratings. However, at the last minute, there was an objection to including language in the conference report.

To correct this problem I, along with Representatives Sherwood and English, brought the matter forward in the fiscal year 2002 supplemental appropriations bill. The language was included in the House version of the bill, and I filed an amendment to Senate bill. During conference negotiations my amendment was defeated and the provisions were not included.

As part of the fiscal year 2004 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education appropriations bill, \$7 million was provided for hospitals in northeast Pennsylvania that continued to be disadvantaged by the Medicare area wage index reclassification. The funding was provided as temporary assistance for those facilities.

During the consideration of the Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement, and Modernization Act of 2003, I met with Finance Committee chairman, CHARLES GRASSLEY, and ranking member MAX BAUCUS about the bill provisions, including the need for a solution to the Medicare area wage index reclassification problem in Pennsylvania. Thereafter, section 508 was included in the bill, which provides \$300 million per year for 3 years to increase funding for hospitals nationally to be reclassified to locations with higher Medicare reimbursement rates. The temporary program, which began in April 2004 and